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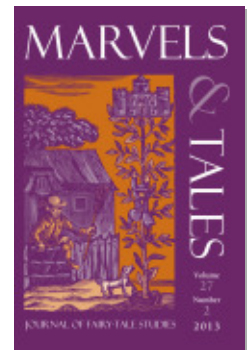
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## **Sleeping Beauty Must Die: The Plots of Perrault's "La belle au bois dormant"**

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## Sleeping Beauty Must Die: The Plots of Perrault's "La belle au bois dormant"

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The cannibalism storyline in Charles Perrault's "La belle au bois dormant" ("The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods") is both disturbing and fascinating, eliciting a wide range of critical response, even as the entire plot has been dropped from most children's editions and many subsequent adaptations.<sup>1</sup> Readers of Perrault's 1697 tale know that after her long sleep the princess is threatened by her ogress mother-in-law, who wants to eat her and her two children. Thanks to the intervention of the ogress's steward, Sleeping Beauty and her children manage to avoid being eaten; however, when the ogress discovers them all alive, she prepares to throw the whole lot—grandchildren, daughter-in-law, steward, and his family—into a vat of snakes, vipers, and toads. At that moment, Sleeping Beauty's husband, now king, returns from war. Rather than face her angry son, the ogress throws herself into the vat and is devoured by her own creatures. Thus a story about sleep ends as a tale of forbidden appetite, prompting Marc Soriano to assert that "La belle au bois dormant" is not one tale but two (125).

Indeed, the cannibalism plot raises many questions about the narrative coherence and structure of the tale. The prince hides his family from his mother for two years, because he fears her appetite for young flesh. Why, then, does he place the whole family under her protection when he becomes king? Furthermore, as the son of an ogress, would the prince not also be subject to ogrelike tendencies?<sup>2</sup> Why did Perrault include the cannibalism plot when his own moral alludes only to the sleep plot? Many critics account for the ogress story line through source study, noting the similarities between the character

and the spurned wife in Giambattista Basile's "Sole, Luna, e Talia" ("Sun, Moon, and Talia").<sup>3</sup> Jeanne Morgan maintains that the narrative incongruities in the tale result from Perrault's twin desire to remain true to his source and to adhere to the literary rules of *bienséances* (85–86). Psychoanalytic treatments of "La belle au bois dormant" often read the ogress as a necessary foil for Sleeping Beauty.<sup>4</sup> Two recent sociocultural analyses of the tale treat the ogress plot as integral to the text's overarching themes: Jean-Pierre van Elslande suggests that the ambivalent behavior of the prince/king toward his mother betrays a kind of powerlessness, which reflects Perrault's own ambivalence toward "les Grands" (453–54). In his study of food, visual spectacle, and the processes of acculturation in "La belle au bois dormant," Philip Lewis reads the cannibalism plot as central to Perrault's exploration of the tensions between the civilizing process and nature (133). Moreover, Lewis argues that the tale achieves symmetry through repetition: in each story line the princess is threatened by death and saved by her Prince Charming (150).

Although the narrative structure of the tale does seem guided by repetition—or what Tzvetan Todorov calls the ideological organization, where different adventures are linked through the application of a higher, abstract rule (42)—the two plots diverge in their treatment of Sleeping Beauty's would-be assassins. Although the ogress, who serves as the agent of evil in the cannibalism plot, meets a horrible death, the old fairy who curses the baby princess with death in the sleep plot goes unpunished and fades from the story. For Bruno Bettelheim, this missing punishment is reason enough for the story line of the ogress, whose gruesome death ensures that "fairy-story justice" is accomplished (230).<sup>5</sup> The purpose of the cannibalism plot, then, would be to punish the ogress in the place of the old fairy, substituting one woman, one death, for another. This suggests that the relationship between the two plots is more complicated, and that they are bound together by more than repetition. Reading Bettelheim's comment back through Lewis's observation about the repetitive structure of the tale opens up a slightly different question about this dual-plot tale. Instead of "Why did Perrault include the cannibalism plot?" we may ask, "How does a tale of a sleeping princess become that of a hungry ogress?" In other words, what are the narrative processes that transform one plot into another, and what do these processes reveal about "La belle au bois dormant" as a whole?

This essay will trace the narrative progression of "La belle au bois dormant," showing that substitution is the organizing principle of the tale. Substitution underlies many of the repetitions in the story, but more significantly, it operates as the motor of the narrative, drawing the story out, through both metaphor and metonymy, the "master tropes" of story in Peter Brooks's words (338). By following the metaphoric and metonymic substitutions that drive

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the tale, I will elucidate not only the transformation of the sleep plot into the cannibalism plot, but also the transformation of the central character: from sleeping princess to devouring mother-in-law. Each serves as a substitute for the other. The narratological reading of “La belle au bois dormant” allows us to understand the crucial role of the ogress and the function of her death in the tale’s imagination. It also exposes the tale’s underlying preoccupation: women who would withdraw from the societal *and* the narrative order must die.

### A Detour from Death

It is Sleeping Beauty, of course, who is supposed to die. The king and queen, who had long prayed for her birth, throw a lavish christening party, followed by a banquet for her seven fairy godmothers. Each of the godmothers is given a magnificent golden case filled with jewel-encrusted cutlery. However, an eighth fairy shows up unexpectedly. She had not been invited, because no one had seen her for the last fifty years. Miffed that the royal family had neither invited her nor given her one of the golden cases of cutlery, the old fairy curses the baby princess: she will prick her hand on a distaff and die. Luckily, a younger fairy, who had not yet bestowed a gift on the princess, is able to mitigate the curse, changing death to a hundred years’ sleep.

The first half of “La belle au bois dormant” hinges upon the substitution of sleep for death. Before examining the effect of this substitution, let us consider how it works. Sleep and death have a long association with each other in Western culture, a relationship crystallized in their personification in Greek mythology as the identical twin brothers Hypnos and Thanatos. The brothering of sleep and death suggests that there is something other than mere resemblance that connects them. Montaigne, for example, writes that sleep serves to instruct and prepare us for death. While death is unknowable by the living, sleep is the next closest state: “Si nous ne la pouvons joindre [la mort], nous la pouvons approcher, nous la pouvons reconnoistre. . . . Ce n’est pas sans raison qu’on nous fait regarder à nostre sommeil mesme, pour la ressemblance qu’il a de la mort” (“If we cannot contact death, we can approach it, we can recognize it. . . . It is not without reason that we see a resemblance to death in our own sleep” [351]).<sup>6</sup> For Montaigne, sleep and death are related on both metaphorical and metonymical registers. Sleep’s immobility and passivity make it an apt metaphor for death, which in turn reinforces the metonymical relationship between them. Metonymy is a figure of substitution based not on analogy but on contiguity. In Montaigne’s model sleep and death are related practically, separated only by degrees.

Moreover, Montaigne makes it clear that the metaphorical and the metonymical support each other. Whereas the tropes were once considered

dichotomous by rhetoricians and linguists, an idea cemented by Roman Jakobson's 1956 article on aphasia, recent scholarship has emphasized their interconnectedness, especially in regard to narrative prose.<sup>7</sup> Jakobson aligns metaphor with poetry and argues that metonymy is the dominant figure of prose, and realist fiction in particular, which uses contiguous digressions to advance the story (111). Subsequent theorists, however, have asserted that metaphor and metonymy must function together to ensure narrative progression. Gérard Genette convincingly argues that the interplay of metaphor and metonymy is crucial to the madeleine scene that gives rise to the entire narrative of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. While the taste of the cookie dipped in tea evokes involuntary memory in a way that seems purely metaphorical, Genette demonstrates that the event sets off a chain reaction that progresses through contiguity, calling forth successive pieces attached to Combray and to each other: room, house, village, and people (55). "C'est la métaphore qui retrouve le Temps perdu, mais c'est la métonymie qui le ranime, et le remet en marche" ("It is metaphor that finds Lost Time, but it is metonymy that reanimates it and sets it going again" [63]).

Genette's analysis of Proust suggests that metonymy and metaphor each play a vital and particular role in narrative progression. While metonymy moves us from point to point in the narrative, metaphor provides an organizing image that is "totalizing," in Brooks's words (91). Moreover, Brooks argues that this totalizing image is where the narrative wants to end. "We read the incidents of narration as 'promises and annunciations' of final coherence, that metaphor may be reached through the chain of metonymies" (93–94). The chain of metonymies must not only lead toward the metaphor at the end, but must also lead to the right end. One common tension in narrative, writes Brooks, is the possibility of a premature ending, or the wrong ending. The baby princess cursed with an early death is a good example of the threat of everything—her life and the story—ending too quickly. The necessary narrative response, according to Brooks, is delay or detour, until the correct end can be reached. "The complication of the detour is related to the danger of short-circuit: the danger of reaching the end too quickly, of achieving the improper death" (103–04). Thus, the "master tropes" of substitution, metaphor and metonymy, are the tools of proper narrative progression. Drawing the story out, meandering toward the final meaning, metaphor and metonymy create that middle space between beginning and conclusion, the "squiggle toward the end" (Brooks 104)—or "l'espace dilatoire" ("the dilatory space"), as Barthes calls it—the space of deviation, false leads, twists, and turns (82).

Reading these observations back into "La belle au bois dormant," we see how the tale is one long detour from death, whose pronouncement at the banquet "fit frémir toute la compagnie" ("makes the whole gathering tremble"

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[188]). This is the fear of the wrong death at the wrong time. The story, after all, has just begun. If we take a close look at the moment of the death curse, we see that in breaking off the expanding list of the princess's gifts, the curse forecloses the future narrative that the fairies are spinning. Each gift or talent relates to the previous one, a chain driven by metaphoric and metonymic associations between key words. The first gift, "elle serait la plus belle personne du monde" ("she will be the most beautiful person in the world") is followed by "l'esprit comme un Ange" ("a mind like an Angels" [186]). On one level, beauty shifts laterally to intellect, while on another level, the princess's superlative, worldly beauty leads to the angel association. Another figurative shift takes us to the third gift, "une grâce admirable" ("an admirable grace"), which angels surely possess. Grace applies to the idea of movement, thus talent in dance, which then leads to singing: "elle chanterait comme un Rossignol" ("she would sing like a Nightingale" [186]). Although the nightingale is a common metaphor for singing, it also is the name of a particular organ stop that mimics the warbling of birds.<sup>8</sup> Thus "Rossignol" prepares the sixth gift: "qu'elle jouerait de toutes sortes d'instruments dans la dernière perfection" ("that she would play all sorts of instruments to the highest perfection" [186–88]). The use of "dernière" is interesting because while in this context it conveys a sense of superiority, the adjective also subtly evokes an ending, as its primary denotation is "last." Thus the next gift will be the last: death, which follows associatively from "la dernière perfection," and which halts the stream of gifts. Moreover, the death curse throws into doubt all of the previous talents bestowed on the princess, who may not live long enough to accomplish them fully. Just as the curse short-circuits the chain of gift giving, it threatens to short-circuit the entire narrative. The pronouncement of the early death is also a pronouncement of an early end to the story.

Death must be avoided for the story to continue. The attenuation of the death curse to one hundred years' sleep constitutes the first substitution, the first step in the necessary delay. The enchanted sleep does not circumvent death entirely, since presumably the princess is still mortal. She will die one day, but far in the future. This is underscored by the futility of the king's actions. He would rather foil death than delay it, so he behaves as though the death curse were still in effect, banning all spinning instruments "pour tâcher d'éviter le Malheur annoncé par la vieille" ("to try to avoid the Curse announced by the old fairy" [188]). The king is out of step with the story, for the young fairy's sleep modification has already replaced the death curse. And of course, despite his edict, the princess does prick herself on a spindle: "comme elle était fort vive, un peu étourdie, et que d'ailleurs l'Arrêt des Fées l'ordonnait ainsi" ("as she was quite lively, a little careless, and besides the Law of Fairies commanded it thus" [188]). The narrative follows the law of the enchantment,

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which has replaced premature death with sleep but has not ruled out eventual death. Always lurking beneath the enchanted sleep is the specter of death. When the prince comes to the enchanted chateau, he is startled by the sight of inert bodies lying everywhere: “c’était un silence affreux, l’image de la mort” (“there was a horrible silence, the image of death” [192]). Though the prince quickly realizes that everyone is slumbering, sleep’s uncanny resemblance to death reminds the reader of the original curse, and also foreshadows the future deaths threatened by the ogress.

But in the meantime, the substitution of sleep for premature death balloons the life span of the princess and the life span of the story, opening up new possibilities, “the dilatory space.” Indeed, this movement is evident when the princess does succumb to her sleep. Arriving shortly afterward, the young fairy decides to extend the sleep enchantment spatially: she puts to sleep nearly everyone and everything in the castle—courtiers, ladies-in-waiting, maids, cooks, guards, horses, the princess’s dog, and even the fires in the hearth. The princess’s sleep is thus spread metonymically, touching the people and things around her. With great foresight, the young fairy imagines that the princess will need these supports when she awakens (189). In expanding the sleep curse outward, the young fairy has effectively expanded or dilated the future narrative forward: the princess will be able to resume her old life in one hundred years. The metonymic magic wand of the young fairy has delayed death and guaranteed the progression of the narrative.

### **Metonymic and Metaphoric Magic**

Although the young fairy fades from the story at this point, the chain of substitution that she has initiated with the sleep enchantment continues. Each substitution, whether it operates patently through metaphor or metonymy or both, functions to drive the story forward while creating the necessary delay of death. After the sleep plot comes to its anticipated resolution—a hundred years later the prince penetrates the sleeping chateau and the princess awakens—the narrative effects the next shift. This is a much more subtle transition than the previous replacement of sleep for premature death. Indeed, as I noted earlier, many subsequent versions of the Sleeping Beauty tale end the story with the marriage of the prince and princess. There is a marriage in Perrault’s account; however, it is preceded by a short episode that serves as a hinge between the sleep plot and the ensuing cannibalism plot. When sleep ends, it is replaced by hunger:

Cependant tout le Palais s’était réveillé avec la Princesse; chacun songeait à faire sa charge, et comme ils n’étaient pas tous amoureux, ils mouraient de faim; la Dame d’honneur, pressée comme les autres,

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s'impatiente, et dit tout haut à la Princesse que la viande était servie.  
(194–95)

[However, the entire palace had awakened with the princess; each thought of his tasks, and as they were not all in love, they were dying of hunger; the lady in waiting, as hurried as the others, grew impatient and announced to the princess that the meal was served.]

While the princess is distracted with her new love, her servants have awakened from their long sleep to hunger, and they prepare a banquet. They fulfill their duties precisely as the young fairy intended when she expanded the sleep enchantment to include them, ensuring the welfare of the princess and the household. In addition, they provide the next link in the chain of substitutions. Hunger quite naturally follows sleep, especially after one hundred years, and thus constitutes another metonymic substitution in the narrative. The servants' hunger works metaphorically too, as a substitute for the romantic appetites of the royal couple: "comme ils n'étaient pas tous amoureux" ("as they were not all in love" [99]). But it is the subsequent description of their hunger that anticipates and prepares the cannibalism plot: "ils mouraient de faim" ("they were dying of hunger" [194]). The servants are starving to death—figuratively, of course—but the metaphor revives the idea of death. Just as when the prince beholds "the image of death," "they were dying of hunger" recalls both the initial death curse and the restored mortality and temporality of the chateau's inhabitants. No longer protected from the ravages of time in the bubble of sleep, the princess and her people awaken to the inevitability of appetites and of death. Moreover, the notion of "dying of hunger" foreshadows the story plot to come, where the princess and her children almost die from the ogress's hunger. Thus, while the shift from sleep to hunger prolongs the story and delays the end—the death—of the narrative, this shift also anticipates death as the end. At the tale's conclusion, of course, the ogress will die as a result of her own monstrous hunger.

What transports us from the servants' dying of hunger and the death of the ogress is a series of small substitutions that draw the story out. After the wedding and his first night with the princess, the prince returns to his own land, but lies to his parents about his whereabouts the night before. His fabricated story—of spending the night in the hut of a charcoal burner who gave him black bread and cheese to eat—is a veiled account of his wedding night and the banquet. The charcoal burner's occupation, after all, recalls the prince's fiery passion to find the princess—"il se sentait tout de feu" ("he felt himself on fire")—and likely refers also to the consummation of that passion (192). As the narrator slyly says, "ils dormirent peu" ("they slept little" [195]). The replacement story and the prince's subsequent lies allow him to lead a secret life for two years, the purpose of which is not unlike the hundred years of enchanted

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sleep. In terms of the plot, hiding the princess keeps her safe from the uncivilized appetite of the prince's ogress mother. In terms of the narrative progression, hiding the princess once again prolongs the story, long enough indeed for her to bear two children. Even the naming of the children follows the mechanism of substitution that fuels the narrative: the first is named "Aurore" ("Dawn") and the second "Jour, parce qu'il paraissait encore plus beau que sa soeur" ("Day, because he seemed even more beautiful than his sister" [195–97]). The names are chosen for both their metaphoric and metonymic power. Since Day necessarily follows Dawn, the brother is in some sense a substitute for the sister, aesthetically but also politically, as the male offspring will one day inherit the crown.

Accordingly, inheritance functions as the next substitution that spurs the story forward. When the king dies, the prince assumes the royal crown and brings his marriage out into the open. Having replaced his father, he perhaps believes that his authority alone will be enough to guarantee the safety of his family. The substitution of father for son affects the status of all the principles in the story: hereafter, the prince will be referred to as "le Roi" ("the King"), the princess as "la Reine" ("the Queen") or "la jeune Reine" ("the young Queen"), and the ogress as "la Reine-mère" ("the Queen-Mother"). When the new king leaves to make war on his neighbor, another shift in power must take place: "Il laissa la Régence du Royaume à la Reine sa mère, et lui recommanda fort sa femme et ses enfants" ("He left the Regency of the kingdom to the Queen, his mother, and left his wife and children under her protection" [197]). The substitution of ogress mother-in-law for loving father and husband allows the story to develop the cannibalism plot: the queen mother will now attempt to eat her daughter-in-law and grandchildren.

Once again death seems certain, as the ogress holds all of the power. She orders her chief steward to kill her granddaughter Aurore and cook her in a *sauce Robert*. But just as death is circumvented by the substitution of the sleep enchantment, the steward saves Aurore by serving a baby lamb instead. Thus begins a game of substitution of animals for people, a ruse aided by the *sauce Robert*, which, Louis Marin argues, functions as a complex culinary sign that makes it impossible for the ogress to discern the difference between human flesh and animal meat (153). But the steward's choices of animal meat are far from accidental. Metaphor plays a significant role. The lamb is a suitable replacement for Aurore, who throws her arms around the steward's neck "en sautant et en riant" ("while *jumping* and laughing" [198; emphasis added]). When it is Jour's turn to be eaten, the steward kills a small kid, whose horns perhaps recall the fencing foil Jour plays with (198). Finally, the ogress demands to eat her daughter-in-law. The steward despairs, as he does not believe he can pull off the ruse one more time, precisely because it will be difficult to

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find an adequate animal substitute for the queen, whose skin is “un peu dure, quoique belle et blanche; et le moyen de trouver dans la Ménagerie une bête aussi dure que cela?” (“a little tough, although beautiful and white; and where in the menagerie could he find an animal as tough as that?” [198]). When the chain of substitution fails, death seems imminent. The steward resolves to kill her, but relents when she willingly extends her neck to his dagger. Instead, he reveals that her children are alive, and he prepares in her place “une jeune biche” (“a young doe”), perhaps inspired by the queen’s compliant behavior.

Death is averted once more, until the ogress discovers the queen and her children. Enraged at the deception, she prepares to have them thrown into a vat of toads, snakes, and vipers—“lowly beasts,” as Lewis calls them (133). Why does she prepare this end for the family when she could just order them slaughtered for her own consumption? Something has changed; her appetite for revenge is now greater than her appetite for flesh. As Lewis suggests, the ogress’s culinary practice degenerates: from her demands to eat human flesh prepared in a *sauce Robert*, to her plan to tell her son that his family was devoured by wolves, to her preparation of the vat of toads and snakes. Because the humans were replaced by farm and game animals, we can trace a downward descent of animal hierarchy in the narrative’s imagination: from domesticated or herbivorous animals (lamb, goat, and deer), to violent carnivores (wolves), to reptilian and amphibian creatures often associated with evil or sorcery. Marin reminds us that this last group would not likely eat human flesh (155); however, the snakes are an apt choice for the ogress since some species are cannibalistic. The lowly beasts thus function as a metaphoric substitute for the ogress. And just when it seems that death can be deferred no longer, the “*rex ex machina*” allows the final substitution that both saves the family and provides the proper death for the end of the narrative. Rather than face her son, the ogress throws herself into the vat of beasts and is instantly devoured. The mother-in-law takes the place of the family; and for the king, the family takes the place of his mother: “Le Roi ne laissa pas d’en être fâché: elle était sa mère; mais il s’en consola bientôt avec sa belle femme et ses enfants” (“The King could not help but be upset: she was his mother; but he soon consoled himself with his beautiful wife and children” [200]). The chain of substitution functions to delay death long enough to reach the “right” end, which encompasses both death and happiness, however ambiguous.<sup>9</sup> The narrative has now come full circle—from death announced, to death averted, to death achieved—via the mechanism of substitution.

### **The Sleeping Woman and the Devouring Woman**

Substitution allows Sleeping Beauty to avoid death three times. However, the particular supplanting that closes “*La belle au bois dormant*” is a bit more

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complex than the previous substitutions. When the ogress dies in the place of Sleeping Beauty, the latter assumes the full place of the former in the kingdom and in the king's heart. This is an exchange that occurs on a couple of levels. Sleeping Beauty replaces the ogress socially and politically, a shift marked by the transfer of the "queen" title. Submitting herself to the death meant for Sleeping Beauty, the ogress functions as a narratological replacement for her daughter-in-law. Both substitutions are metonymic: the ogress is the final victim in the chain of consumption; Sleeping Beauty is the next queen after the ogress. Indeed, the in-law relationship appears to operate patently through contiguity: the new spouse becomes related to the parent-in-law through marriage with his or her child.<sup>10</sup> However, there may also be a relationship of similarity if the child chooses a spouse who resembles one of his or her parents in some way. While the princess seems to be the polar opposite of her monstrous mother-in-law, the two women share key characteristics that make them apt, if also surprising, substitutes for each other. In other words, there is a strong metaphorical connection between Sleeping Beauty and the ogress.

How do these two figures resemble each other? Let us first consider the nature of the sleeping woman and her function in the sleep plot. The Sleeping Beauty tale, in its many versions, is often read as a tale of renewal, rebirth, and resurrection, similar to the myth of Demeter and Persephone. The princess's long sleep and subsequent reawakening would represent the cycle of nature.<sup>11</sup> Reading more specifically, Bettelheim interprets the episode as symbolic of sexual maturation, where the prick of the spindle signals the onset of menstruation (232–33). Numerous critics have discredited Bettelheim's approach to fairy tales, and Jean Bellemin-Noël in particular points out that in both the Perrault and Grimm versions there is no mention of blood when the princess pricks her finger (114–15).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Bettelheim does offer an additional interpretation of the princess's sleep, one that can be supported by Perrault's text. While the hundred years' sleep represents a necessary period of withdrawal and focus on the self, there is also an antisocial aspect to it. Bettelheim calls this "the isolation of narcissism," noting that the princess's sleep encompasses nearly everyone else in the castle (234). When she falls asleep, the rest of the world ceases to exist for her. This observation is largely consistent with the common experience of normal sleep: closed off to the stimulus of the outside world, the sleeper is turned inward. Moreover, normal sleep is not an experience that can be shared. The sleeper is necessarily a solitary individual, inhabiting a private world.

Furthermore, the sleeper can also be closed off to narrative, as is the case with the sleeping princess. Once the chateau has been prepared for the long sleep, and the kind fairy and the king and queen have departed, what more can the narrative say about one hundred years' sleep? When the trees, bram-

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bles, and thorns grow up around the chateau, “entrelacées les unes dans les autres” (“intertwined”), it is as though the narrative sews itself up (191). Nothing can be told about the sleeping princess until it is time for the prince to part the forest and wake her up, as though reopening a book. Indeed, the narrator surmises that the good fairy must have supplied the princess with pleasant dreams, although there is no way to confirm it: “l’Histoire n’en dit pourtant rien” (“History says nothing about it” [194]). The story cannot see into sleep, and thus the hundred years’ sleep constitutes a kind of narrative suspension, in addition to a suspension of the princess’s life.

Of course, this suspension, or withdrawal from the external world and from the narrative, is necessary to guarantee the princess’s life. But what kind of life is this? A hundred years’ sleep may as well be death for an adolescent in the full bloom of youth and sexuality. The story understands this: “La bonne Fée qui lui avait sauvé la vie, en la condamnant à dormir cent ans” (“The good Fairy who had saved her life by condemning her to sleep for a hundred years” [189; emphasis added]). Sleep’s salvation still constitutes a horrible curse, one that resembles death too closely. The servants throw water on the sleeping princess’s face, they slap and decorset her, but “rien ne la faisait revenir” (“nothing would make her come back”) [189]. She is gone. Only the sound of her breath signifies that she is not dead, a marker similar to the reddened faces of the servants whom the prince finds strewn about the chateau (192). Sleep functions as a border space: neither life nor death, it nevertheless displays characteristics of both. The sleeping princess thus embodies a kind of paradox: she sleeps to preserve her life, but her life such as it is resembles death.

The ogress shares many of the characteristics of Sleeping Beauty, mirroring the sleeping woman by virtue of her own narcissism and the paradox of her hunger. Perrault alludes to this broadly in the segment where the prince first spies the castle in the sleeping woods. Rumor has it that it may be a haunted castle, a meeting place for witches, or the abode of a child-eating ogre who alone has the power to penetrate the forest (192).<sup>13</sup> Noting the irony of these tall tales, Anne Duggan remarks that “it is as if the rumors about Sleeping Beauty’s castle refer instead to the [ogress] queen” (154). Indeed, the ogre-in-the-woods rumor not only foreshadows the cannibalism plot, but also slyly hints at the deeper metaphorical relationship between the two figures. Like the sleeper, the ogress is a figure turned inward upon herself. Although she adopts some of the cultural rituals surrounding the consumption of food—such as her request that the human flesh be cooked and served in a *sauce Robert*—there is a strong antisocial aspect to her eating. Once the king is away, the ogress relocates the family from the royal palace to “une maison de campagne dans les bois, pour pouvoir plus aisément assouvir son horrible envie” (“a country house in the woods, so that she could more easily satisfy her horrible

desire" [197]). Once again, the forest functions as the locus of isolation, providing cover for the devourer as it did for the sleeper.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the ogress dines alone, in contrast to the two previous banquet scenes, which emphasize communal eating. Of course, the antisocial dimension of the ogress's eating is abundantly clear in her choice of food: she would eat her own kin and living companions, those closest to her in blood and in geographical proximity. The ogress's feeding is remarkably similar to the way sleep overtakes everyone surrounding the enchanted princess. At the height of her frenzy, the ogress even prepares to destroy her steward, his wife, and their servant. Both the sleeping woman and the devouring woman function as a kind of vortex, pulling in the people surrounding them.

The ogress is most destructive and most narcissistic in her desire to eat her own grandchildren. If she abandons the social and cultural functions of eating, as Lewis argues (152–53), the ogress also rejects the bio-evolutionary function of eating, through her desire to eat of her own blood. One eats to live. Sustenance provides the organism with energy to create and procreate. But though satisfying her appetite may keep the ogress alive, it would destroy future generations. In seeking to eat her own progeny, the ogress would cut off her own bloodline, a kind of self-cannibalism that she enacts at the end by jumping into her own vat of devouring creatures. Like the enchanted sleeping princess existing between life and death, the cannibalistic ogress is a paradox: by feeding her hunger, she destroys herself. This is not just consumption out of control, but a regressive hunger. The grandchildren, after all, are named "Dawn" and "Day." The ogress would turn back the clock by eating them, imaginarily returning us to the beginning of the tale, where a childless couple yearns for offspring. In this way the ogress not only threatens to cut off the royal bloodline of her own house and that of Sleeping Beauty's parents, but she also endangers the narrative's advancement, looping the story back on itself. Where the princess's sleep introduces a gap that cannot be narrativized, the ogress's hunger represents the possibility that the story will consume itself, like the serpent devouring its own tail. Although radically different on the surface, the sleeping woman and the devouring woman are excellent substitutes for each other, because they fulfill the same narrative function in the tale. Each constitutes a central, paradoxical figure who threatens the narrative progression, and who ultimately must die.

### **The Death of Sleeping Beauty**

But the princess does not die. That is, after all, the point of the story. However, awakening at the end of the hundred years' sleep does constitute a death of sorts: the end of the princess's role as Sleeping Beauty. No longer the immobile,

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silent, and closed woman who is effectively unavailable to the narrative, the awakened princess is quickly recuperated and transformed into a wife, a mother, a queen—a woman defined by societal and familial roles. In that sense, the solitary, narcissistic Sleeping Beauty does die. Furthermore, she dies too by virtue of her relationship with the ogress. When the ogress literally takes the princess's place in the vat of deadly creatures, she reinforces their link as substitutes for each other. Behind the satisfyingly "right" death of the evil ogress lies the symbolic death of the princess.

What does this death mean? What dies in the imaginary death of Sleeping Beauty are all of the qualities she shares with the ogress: her antisocial behavior, her paradoxical nature, her ability to trouble the narrative progression. In fact, reading the ogress and Sleeping Beauty as substitutes for each other highlights the extent to which "La belle au bois dormant" is a tale about problematic women. In turning away from the outside world—the one in her sleep, the other in her appetite—they potentially disrupt the narrative. In this light, even the old fairy who curses the princess is part of the pattern. The king and queen did not invite the fairy to the baby's baptism, because "il y avait plus de cinquante ans qu'elle n'était sortie d'une Tour et qu'on la croyait morte, ou enchantée" ("it had been more than fifty years since she had left her Tower, and she was believed to be dead or enchanted" [186]). Indeed, Sleeping Beauty is targeted with the very fate of which the old fairy is suspected: death first, and then enchantment in a tower. Now we can understand the seeming disappearance of the old fairy from the tale: she functions as an anterior double to both Sleeping Beauty and the ogress. The original antisocial woman is replaced by the sleeping princess, who is then subsequently replaced by the ogress. And like her successors, the old fairy threatens the narrative progression, in her case by introducing death too soon.

In fact, the whole tale springs from the reclusive fairy's failed attempt to rejoin society. "La belle au bois dormant" thus suggests that a woman's assimilation is best achieved through marriage. This is the prominent theme of the moral appended to the story. While the relationship between Perrault's verse morals and his prose narratives is an entire question in itself, we can approach the moral of "La belle au bois dormant" as just another instance of metaphorical and metonymical substitution.<sup>15</sup> As the hindmost piece of text attached to the tale, the moral would seem to offer the final word on the meaning of the narrative, the last link in the chain of substitutions on a macro level. The moral to "La belle au bois dormant" even mirrors the plot structure of the narrative: the author offers one meaning and then adds another, prolonging the lesson: "La Fable semble encor vouloir nous faire entendre" ("The Fable also seems to want us to understand" [200]). However, after this stirring tale of enchantment, attempted cannibalism, and gruesome death, the two morals are rather

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flippant. Both appear to praise the virtues of waiting for marriage. First, Perrault jokes about the idea of a woman waiting one hundred years for an appropriate spouse; then he speaks more generally about delaying marriage, declaring the tale's message to be: "Et qu'on ne perd rien pour attendre" ("And one loses nothing by waiting" [200]). As I noted earlier, there is no reference to the ogress and her attempts to eat her family. The two morals read like a deflection, as though Perrault were applying his own *sauce Robert* to leave us with a particular taste in our mouths as we come away from the story. But in fact it is the irony of the morals that betrays their meaning and links them back to the prose narrative. Although both make jabs at women who single-mindedly pursue marriage, each moral ends on a negative that undermines the purported message of the tale:

On ne trouve plus de femelle,  
Qui dormît si tranquillement.  
...  
Mais le sexe avec tant d'ardeur,  
Aspire à la foi conjugale,  
Que je n'ai pas la force ni le coeur,  
De lui prêcher cette morale. (200)

[No longer will one find a woman  
Who would sleep so tranquilly.  
...  
But the fair sex with such ardor,  
Aspires to the conjugal trust,  
That I have neither the strength nor the heart  
To preach to her this moral.]

On the one hand, no woman exists who would wait as long as Sleeping Beauty for her prince; on the other hand, the author admits that he has neither the strength nor the *heart* to advocate waiting for marriage. Perrault thus slyly reverses his proposed lessons. The moral of "La belle au bois dormant" would be: women, marry *without* delay, a message that is consistent with the narrative's theme. Isolating oneself from the world, whether through sleep or appetite, is destructive. If such a woman cannot be reintegrated into society—and the widowed ogress is really beyond redemption—she must die.

The death of the ogress is of paramount importance. It carries a global meaning that resonates throughout the tale. It is not simply the punishment of

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evil, but the obliteration of the woman who withdraws from the social order, and who would trouble the narrative order as well. This death not only supplies the desired narrative end but also represents the elimination of the forces that would forestall, short-circuit, or otherwise endanger the narrative progression. The literal death of the ogress and the imaginary death of Sleeping Beauty ensure the full dilation and closure of the story. This is the right death at the right time. Thanks to the play of substitution, the original death curse comes full circle, from one problematic woman to another. And thanks to the play of substitution, one problematic woman is another. The self-cannibalistic gesture that closes the narrative is thus emblematic of the whole tale: like the closed circle she is, the antisocial woman destroys herself. Ultimately, then, the original death curse holds the answer to my initial question about Perrault's two plots. The tales of enchanted sleep and forbidden appetite are the systematic means of managing and directing death to the most potent and symbolic target. And the narratological reading reveals that target to be a quite specific creature. At the heart of "La belle au bois dormant" is a warning about self-isolating women. It is not enough to banish the hungry ogresses and mean fairies of the world. Sleeping Beauty must die too.

### Notes

A preliminary version of this article was presented at the 2004 Group for Early Modern Cultural Studies Conference, held in Orlando, Florida, from November 18 to 21, 2004. I would like to thank my fellow panel speakers and the participants for their useful questions and suggestions.

1. The Grimm brothers' 1857 "Dornröschen" ("Briar Rose") ends with Sleeping Beauty's marriage to the prince. Most modern interpretations, such as Disney's 1959 film *Sleeping Beauty*, also drop the ogress story line among other alterations. See Heidi Anne Heiner's *SurLaLune Fairy Tale Pages* for an annotated list of contemporary versions of the Sleeping Beauty tale in literature, film, poetry, and theater.
2. François Rigolot pursues the prince's ogre heritage, revealing several moments in the text that suggest, or at least leave open the possibility, that he too is subject to his mother's power and inclinations (94–95).
3. "Sole, Luna, e Talia," from the *Pentamerone* (1634), is commonly held to be Perrault's chief source for "La belle au bois dormant," along with the tale of Zellandine in the fourteenth-century *Roman de Perceforest*. In Basile's tale the sleeping beauty, Talia, is impregnated in her sleep by a king who already has a wife. The jealous queen plots to have Talia's two children cooked and served to the king, but as in Perrault's version Talia and her children are saved and the queen is killed. For more on Perrault's possible sources, see Soriano (125–34) and Robert (87–90).
4. In her Jungian analysis of the tale, Barbara Bucknall suggests that the ogress represents the shadow side of the sleeping princess (101).



5. Bettelheim's treatment of fairy tales in his 1976 *The Uses of Enchantment* has been widely criticized for its misreading of Freudian theory and its universalizing approach to children and the tales. See, in particular, Donald Haase (359–60) and Jack Zipes (*Breaking the Magic Spell* 185–88). Although I agree with both Zipes's and Haase's overall assessment, I find that Bettelheim makes some useful remarks about the Sleeping Beauty tale, which I will explore in this essay.
6. All translations are my own.
7. Jakobson conceives of metaphor and metonymy as fundamentally opposed tropes in competition with each other (113).
8. See the 1926 *Dictionnaire pratique et historique de la musique* by Michel Brenet (395).
9. As Rigolot suggests, the son of an ogress may "console" himself by drowning his sorrows in food (95). Sleeping Beauty and her children may still be in danger. The ambiguity of the closing line of the tale indicates an additional substitution that would continue the story: the son will take the role of the mother.
10. See Marina Warner's chapter on the role of the stepmother/mother-in-law in fairy tales. With regard to Sleeping Beauty, Warner suggests that the princess's sleep represents "the dark time that can follow the first encounter between the older woman and her new daughter-in-law" (220).
11. Many critics discuss the theme of renewal with regard to Sleeping Beauty, including Marie-Louise von Franz (24), Deborah Greenhill, and P. L. Travers (60–61).
12. Nor is there blood in Basile's version. While she spins, a piece of stalk gets lodged underneath Talia's fingernail, and she falls down, seemingly dead. Talia awakens only when one of her babies sucks the splinter out (Basile 685–86).
13. This may provide the first clue of the prince's ogre lineage, as the forest brambles part for him quite easily, leading Rigolot to assert that the prince may be more sinister than the tale would have us believe (94–95).
14. Rigolot notes this parallel, calling the woods "un lieu stratégique identique" ("an identical, strategic location") for both the sleep and the ogress episodes. He connects the princess and the ogress through the figure of Diana, goddess of the hunt, who embodies characteristics of both the mother- and daughter-in-law (96).
15. In his preface to the *Contes en vers*, Perrault defends the literariness of the fairy tale by invoking the critical standard of "plaire et instruire," whereby art should be both pleasing and instructive (77). The moral, then, would serve as proof that the fairy tale indeed has a lesson to impart. Critics, however, assert that the relationship between the morals and the prose narratives is much more intricate. See Lewis C. Seifert (51–58) and Morgan (35–54) for two different interpretations of the role of the morals in Perrault's fairy tales.

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